The Significance of Children in Ancient Greece: An Archaeological Analysis

Research Thesis

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

Although ancient Greece has captured scholars' interest for centuries, the topic of ancient Greek children has received little attention until the past few decades. Much of this has been due to the scarcity of evidence of children and childhood; they were rarely written about or depicted in art, and their underrepresentation in the archaeological record has been a recurring issue. As was common in ancient societies, child and infant mortality rates were many times higher than modern rates of industrialized countries. This would logically result in high numbers of dead children, yet most ancient cemeteries have a noticeable absence or underrepresentation of non-adults (Shepherd, 2018). This differentiation between adults and children can be seen in all aspects of child burials, including location, methods, and offerings. When compared with distinctions in how children were perceived, classified, and involved in their communities, this differentiation reflects a general separation between children and the rest of society. The implications of this separation have recently led to conflicting interpretations in scholarship.

An important aspect of these debates about children centers around the importance of

children in ancient Greek society. One side has argued that children were insignificant and unvalued individuals whose loss was barely noticed by their community and even their families. Proponents of this have cited high mortality rates, lack of commemoration, and the practice of infant exposure as evidence of society's and parents' lack of attachment to children, especially the youngest. The separation and differentiation of burial practices between adults and children has also been a frequent part of this side's arguments. The other side, which emphasizes children were indeed significant, cared for, and mourned, has drawn on examples from art, literature, and religious practices. By showing clear evidence of the effort spent raising, mourning, and properly burying children, they have created a strong case for the significance of children in Greek society. However, the absence of a large-scale analysis of archaeological data is apparent in both sides of this debate.

The addition of archaeological evidence into the discussion of the significance of children in ancient Greece allows researchers to see the physical evidence of societal patterns. Cemeteries and burial grounds have been described as "arenas of social power," referring to the ways these areas can reflect social groups and hierarchies (Scott, 1999, 123). Assembling data concerning the burial practices of children and adults from numerous sites over different time periods can thus reveal important insights into the importance of children based on how they were treated in death. The archaeological evidence comes in many forms: "Burial location" refers to where individuals were buried, ranging from established cemeteries to beneath the floors of houses. It also includes whether children were buried among adults, in reserved areas of cemeteries, or separate burial grounds altogether. "Burial method" refers to how an individual was buried, common methods being pot or *enchytrismoi* burials, pit graves, cist graves, and cremation (see Fig. 2-4). "Grave goods" is used to refer to any objects that were included in burials, and can

take many different forms. Taking all these factors into account from a variety of times and locales can provide a holistic picture of how children were classified and treated both in life and in death.

The goal of this paper is to analyze this body of evidence and apply it to the question of the significance of children in ancient Greece. Numerous sites from a variety of times and places have been selected in order to encompass the vastness of cultural variation and change over time (see Fig. 1). Both sides of this debate have utilized archaeological evidence, but they often select specific examples to support their arguments rather than acknowledging the bigger picture that is the complexity of child burial practices. By examining the archaeological evidence on such a large scale, I can more accurately analyze the claims of both sides. Based on compelling arguments from proponents of the significance of children in ancient Greek society, the archaeological evidence would have to strongly testify the opposite for it to be a convincing indicator that children were actually insignificant. In other words, the archaeological record would need to show consistent, strong trends of negligence and apathy toward children in the ways in which they were disposed of. Otherwise, the conclusion that children were socially important will remain the stronger argument.

The analysis of archaeological evidence has identified a number of patterns as well as exceptions. Frequent trends include the underrepresentation of children in the archaeological record, age segregation of burial location, intramural burials for children, age-based differentiation of burial methods, few grave goods for children, similarities in burial practices for older children and adults, and associations between children and religion or magic. The exceptions to these rules feature examples of unexpectedly large concentrations of child burials, intermingling of adult and child burials in the same burial areas, adult intramural burials, similar

burial methods utilized for all age groups, extensive grave goods for children, and blurry distinctions between different child age groups. With these patterns and outliers identified, they can be analyzed and applied to the argument of child significance in ancient Greece.

Individual examples from the archaeological evidence can be applied to both sides debating the significance of children. Naturally, there are cases that could support those arguing the unimportance of children. These include examples of children being buried hastily in out-of-the-way places without any grave goods or commemoration. However, there are just as many—if not more—instances of children receiving careful, respectful burials. With such a mix of results and little to no universal trends in child burial practices, it is impossible to say that the archaeological evidence proves either side of the argument. However, the widespread variation over time and space as well as the lack of compelling evidence for the insignificance of children supports the opposite side more than anything. While there are no absolute answers in the archaeological evidence, it still offers meaningful implications when applied to this debate of child significance.

One of the clearest impressions from the archaeological evidence is the variation of burial practices of all ages, not just children. Adults and children have been found both in formal cemeteries and less obvious places, such as within houses and settlements. The burial methods employed also vary for all age groups, ranging from cremation to pit graves to pot burials. Similarly, the diversity of grave goods is apparent, with barren graves being found just as often as those with elaborate offerings. All of this cultural and temporal variation shows that there was not one reaction to children in ancient Greece. Instead, perceptions and treatment of children likely varied just as much as burial practices. In the context of the child significance debate, this variation rebukes the idea that children lacked social importance by disproving the notion that

children were typically buried with low effort and a lack of respect.

The argument that children were insignificant relies on a few assumptions of the archaeological evidence. One is that there was a consistent lack of effort and care associated with child burials, which is shown not to be the case by the constantly variable funerary treatments of children. Another is that the differentiation of burial practices between adults and children denotes a disparity in social importance. However, there is nothing in the archaeological evidence to suggest that children buried in reserved areas were treated with less respect than adults in communal burial grounds. The same concept applies to any time children received different funerary treatment than adults in burial location, method, or grave goods. Without compelling evidence to show that age-differentiated burial treatment was based on a lack of significance of children, this argument falls flat. Instead, the archaeological evidence leans in favor of children's importance in ancient Greek society.

Between the historical and archaeological data, there is more evidence to support the significance of children in ancient Greece than not. Analyses of the historical information make a compelling case that children held a special status that separated them from adults, yet allowed them to fill important roles in their communities. Meanwhile, the variation of burial practices and lack of any evidence in the archaeological record to suggest that children were unvalued by society drives this point home. This paper seeks to outline both the historical context and archaeological evidence to demonstrate this relationship between the physical evidence and both sides of the debate of children's significance in ancient Greece. Through this, I hope to show the need for more holistic archaeological analyses in studies of ancient Greece and the dangers of making assumptions about the social status of groups that are often underrepresented in history.

Chapter 2 | Historical Context

There is much about children and childhood in ancient Greece that we do not know. They were rarely the subject of literature or art, and most of the information we do have is from anecdotes and inferences from the archaeological record. Like most ancient societies, poor health conditions resulted in high rates of child mortality. The ways in which the Greeks disposed of their deceased children varied in location and method, often differing from the funerary treatment of adults and adolescents. This variation and separation has raised many questions about how the Greeks viewed children in their society. The rift between children and adults can be seen in their classifications of children, rites of passage, and the roles children played in their communities. However, it is clear that children had considerable influence, regardless of their short time on earth.

2.1 | Health and Mortality in Ancient Greece

In ancient Greece, childhood was an extremely vulnerable time. Diarrheal diseases, lack

of birth control, poor swaddling, mothers giving birth too young, and a general lack of medical knowledge all contributed to high mortality rates (Garland, 1990). It is estimated that 30-40% of infants died in their first year, with most deaths occurring in just the first week after birth (Golden, 1990). Approximately 45% percent of children in the ancient Mediterranean died within their first five years, and 50% by their tenth year. For every 1000 live births each year, around 300 died. When this is compared to modern rates of less than 10 deaths per 1000 live births per year, it is clear that ancient peoples were no strangers to premature deaths (Shepherd, 2018).

2.2 | Burial Practices of Children

Due to the high rates of child and infant mortality, it would make sense for archaeologists to find a significant infant presence in ancient cemeteries. Scholars have postulated that 45-51% of an ideal cemetery would be made up of children under the age of nine, with 30% of the total funerary population composed of infants alone (Scott, 1999; Shepherd, 2018). However, these "ideal cemeteries" rarely exist in the archaeological record. Instead, the underrepresentation of children, especially those under the age of three, has been a common paradox for archaeologists (Shepherd, 2018). There are many factors that affect the recovery of ancient human remains; preservation, social practices, and archaeological methods can all determine the success of mortuary excavations. When it comes to the question of underrepresented children, it has been established that this is due to social practices of differential burial treatment based on age. This explanation can be applied in cases of overrepresentation of children as well (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). The contrast between the expected numbers of children in ancient cemeteries and reality points to deliberate and distinct burial practices for children.

The trend of age segregation in burial grounds can be seen as early as the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition, and it continued throughout European prehistory and beyond (Scott, 1999). In Greece in particular, this practice seems to have mainly singled out the very young. Infants and children under three years old are rarely found buried with adults, and there are sometimes whole time periods from which very few child burials have been discovered at all, such as the Geometric Period in Attica (Bourbou, Themelis, 2010; Garland, 1990). Clearly, the majority of the infant dead were disposed of elsewhere, outside of cemeteries, eluding discovery by archaeologists (Scott, 1999). In some cases, archaeological evidence from sites that have yielded infant burials can give clues as to where these "missing" children ended up.

Intramural burials, or those within domestic or habitation contexts, appear to have been common for children and sometimes adults until the Archaic period (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010; Shepherd, 2018). However, there is evidence that this trend continued longer for children, even into the early Roman period (Scott, 1999). Scholars have sought to explain this connection between infants and domestic space, suggesting that children could have served as offerings to spirits of the home, their bodies could have been considered to carry less spiritual pollution than those of adults, or perhaps they were laid to rest in homes because that is where they had spent their brief lives (Garland, 1990). Regardless of the reasoning, it is clear that a variety of spaces were considered suitable for the burial of deceased children (Shepherd, 2018). Underrepresentation of children in standard cemetery contexts does not indicate children were deprived of funerary treatment altogether. Instead, it is a testament to the vast variation in child burial treatment and the distinct social practices between children and adults.

Just as intramural burials point to the spatial variation in child burials, there is great diversity in the ways in which children and infants were buried. *Enchytrismos,* the inhumation of

the deceased in large storage vessels, is widely considered the most common burial method for children, but some sites lack any evidence of this practice (Shepherd, 2018). The spatial organization of *enchytrismoi* burials also varies, as they are sometimes found scattered among adult burials and other times in their own areas in segregated necropoleis (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). Other burial methods were employed for children, including cist graves, wooden coffins, and even cremation, although this was extremely rare (Houby-Nielsen, 1995; 2000). This pattern of burial variation holds true with the presence of grave goods in children's graves, in which there is a lack of overarching trends (Shepherd, 2018). In some cases, infants and young children completely lack grave goods, but there are numerous cases of eating and drinking vessels and toys accompanying child burials (Beaumont, 2012; Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). Although there are discernible patterns in burial methods for children, there is great temporal and spatial variation.

The diversity of burial locations and methods in the ancient Greek world indicates changing social norms and ideas surrounding children. It is abundantly clear that there were many socially acceptable ways to handle deceased children and infants, alluding to a greater flexibility than the practices associated with adult burials (Shepherd, 2018). At sites where infants are underrepresented in the archaeological record, it is worth wondering what mechanisms determined the visibility of some children over others in cemeteries. Since places of burial were highly influenced by perceptions of social power, the presence or absence of children has important implications for how children were viewed by their societies (Scott, 1999). Differentiated funerary treatment for children indicates they occupied a different social niche than adults, while the large amount of variation in burial practices for children suggests there was much variability in how exactly this social separation influenced cultural customs.

2.3 | Ancient Ideas of Children and Childhood

The frequent differences between the burial practices for children and adults throughout ancient Greek history reflects the Greeks' interpretation of children on an ideological level. Perceived differences between these age groups resulted in the contrast archaeologists have seen in funerary customs (Scott, 1999). One explanation for this separation centers around how children, especially infants, are tethered to the world of the living. In this line of thought, ancient Greeks view infants as only loosely connected to the earthly world, thus requiring different burial customs and practices upon their death (Garland, 1985). Since infants are often seen as symbols of birth and life, a deceased infant is a paradox, a manifestation of both life and death (Scott, 1999). This liminality of children and infants in Greek society is an important factor in how they were treated in death.

With the evidence currently available, it is difficult to infer how children were classified by ancient Greek society. As indicated by the extensive range of burial practices, there was no universal ideology of children (Scott, 1999). How the ancient Greeks conceptualized children's age groups is unclear. There is a lack of any vocabulary that divides childhood into different stages, despite the often clear demarcations between ages in the burial record. In Athens, the distinction of infants (0-1 year old), small children (1-3 or 4 years old), and older children (3-4 to 8-10 years old) is made evident by the choice of burial method and the type of grave goods. Interestingly, these age categories remained unchanged throughout the first millennium BC, regardless of the changes in both Athens' political status and the frequency of child burials (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). The lack of explicit age classification of children indicates yet another separation between children and adults in ancient Greek society.

Although there were no ancient Greek words for different stages of childhood, the

notable dates and age festivals in Athenian society give some idea of how children were conceptualized and classified. The first significant ceremony in a child's life was the Amphidromia on the fifth day after birth, when the infant was welcomed into the household (Beaumont, 2012). The child was not named until around the tenth day, legitimizing the place of the child in its family. However, the infant still lacked any form of political, legal, or civic identity. The child's world grew slightly larger during the annual Apatouria festival, when infants were registered into hereditary clans called *phratriai.* Again, this was only a subset of the child's larger community, but it marked the infant's first introduction to the world outside of its close family (Garland, 1990). The Choes festival may have marked the end of infancy and the first formal admittance of children into the religious community around the age of three. This festival, unlike the previous rites of passage, marked the first step into the development of a civic identity outside of the familial realm (Garland, 1985; 1990). Such a gradual integration into the adult world underlines the perceived "otherness" of children in Greek society.

It is important to understand that while children were viewed as fundamentally different than adults, they were not outcasts at the fringes of Greek society. The roles that children played in their communities were separate, but still relevant and meaningful. Children played a significant role in the religious sphere, performing duties as temple servants, members of religious choruses, and even priests. The prominence of children in religion was made possible by their perceived differences from adults. They were thought to symbolize purity and lacked spiritual pollution, unlike adults (Garland, 1990). This lack of pollution seems to have applied to children even in death, as this may have been a determining factor in the burial of infants inside the home and even in sanctuaries—places in which adults were rarely allowed to be buried (Garland, 1990; Kostanti, 2017). Beliefs about the connection between children and mystical

forces are additionally illustrated by Pliny's description of the magical and healing qualities of a child's first haircut and the first lost tooth; the former was believed to relieve gout, and the latter to ward off pubic discomfort in women (Garland, 1990). The unique social standing of children fostered these connections to the religious and magical spheres, giving them power and influence in their own right.

In Athens in particular, children had an additional place in society as the key to the survival of the *polis*, or city-state. As the emphasis on the *polis* grew during the 8th century BC into the Archaic period, the focus of Athenian society shifted to the maintenance of the city-state's strength and well-being. At this same time, there was a notable rise in formal infant burials in Athens. Since the burial practices of children reflect their community's interpretations of them, it is unlikely that this was a coincidence. Thus, the timing of the increased visibility of children in the burial record suggests the growing emphasis on the survival of the *polis* was the reason for the rise in burials (Beaumont, 2012; Houby-Nielsen, 2000). This correlation is a visible example of children receiving treatment tailored to their unique social status. Young Athenian girls also had specific roles in the survival of the *polis.* These included duties in the *Arkteia* at the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia, and as attendants to Athena as *arrhephoroi.* The *Arkteia* in particular was performed to prevent plague or drought, placing significant responsibility on young girls around or before pubescent age (Garland, 1990).

Ancient Greek art and literature reveal the influence of children on society through another avenue: emotion. The death of the infant Trojan prince and son of Hector and Andromache, Astyanax, is depicted in Athenian art repeatedly, dating at least as far back as the late 8th century BC (Golden, 1990). In the Iliad, the infant is thrown from the walls of Troy by the Greeks, who fear that he would avenge his father's death if left alive. This story also appears

in Euripides' *Trojan Women,* which features a gut-wrenching scene as Hekabe, Astyanax's grandmother, laments her infant grandson (Garland, 1985). The *pathos* of Astyanax's death in Greek culture also shows that ancient Greeks' sympathy for children extended to non-Greek children. In history, Herodotus and Thucydides both stress the horror of the massacre of schoolchildren in Mycalessus. Although children were often absent in art until the 4th century BC, there are numerous examples of emotional images of children and parents on Attic grave stelai (Golden, 1990). These examples, among others, clearly illustrate the use of children to provoke emotion and sympathy. The effect that art and literature involving the deaths of children had on its viewers was understood by its creators and used intentionally as an emotional device. The "otherness" of children can be seen in how they were classified and treated both in life and in death. But rather than this having an isolating effect, children gained special roles and influence in religious, civic, and artistic spheres of Greek society.

Chapter 3 | The Significance of Children

The historical evidence has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars; some are quick to conclude that children, especially infants, were unimportant and unloved, while others argue that their importance is evidenced by the great deal of effort and sacrifice put into their upbringing. Both sides have drawn on evidence of high mortality rates, differentiation of burial practices, the practice of exposure, and religious practices to support their arguments. However, they both have considerable gaps when it comes to encompassing cultural variation, especially in burial practices. The variation of cultural practices and ideologies over time and space is crucial to understanding the significance of children in Greece as a whole.

3.1 | Arguments for the Insignificance of Children in Ancient Greece

It is well known that the mortality rates of children in ancient Greece were high. Over the past several decades, scholars have used this information to argue that children were socially

insignificant. Robert Garland (1990, 147) writes, “in societies which experience a high level of infant or child mortality it is generally assumed that the degree of affect between parents and children is appreciably lower than in those where deaths of young persons are comparatively rare.” This mirrors Sarah Pomeroy’s (1975, 76) sentiments that “the natural mortality of young children would seem to discourage the formation of strong mother-child bonds.” M.I. Finley similarly suggests that the emotional response to the death of a child in ancient Greece would be different than modern responses due to the frequency of such occurrences. Philippe Aries, Ivy Pinchbeck, Margaret Hewitt, Edward Shorter, and Lawrence Stone have all argued that love and affection were probably less prevalent in preindustrial societies due to high mortality rates. All of these scholars pushed the assumption that the demography of a population determines its emotional behaviors (Golden, 1988).

Evidence of a lack of emotional attachment to children, especially the very young, has been used repeatedly to support the idea that children were insignificant in ancient Greek society. On epitaphs, the deaths of those under the age of two are never said to be *ahoros*, “untimely” (Golden, 1990). This sentiment seems to have also existed in Roman times, evidenced by Cicero’s statement that “if a child dies young, one should console himself easily...if he dies in the cradle, one doesn't even pay attention” (Golden, 1988, 155). Similarly, Robert Hertz declared that “the deaths of children provoke only a very weak social reaction which is almost instantaneously completed….since society has not yet given anything of itself to the child, it is not affected by its disappearance and remains indifferent” (Garland, 1985, 80). Parental affection in general is said to have depended on the sex of the child and the size of the family. Only children, firstborns, lastborns, and those born to elderly parents received special affection, and the birth of a son was a relief (Garland, 1990; Golden, 1990). From this perspective, neither love

nor grief was guaranteed for a child in ancient Greece.

As discussed above, burial differentiation between children and adults was common. It has been argued that the practices used for children were often cheaper, less ceremonious, and overall less careful than those of adults. They were rarely commemorated and allowed to be buried within city boundaries (Golden, 1990). The use of pots for the inhumation of infants has been called "burying children cheaply" (Garland, 1985, 74), since coarse, often undecorated *pithoi, hydriai,* and *amphorai* were typically recycled for this purpose. Garland (1985, 74), citing an example of a child buried within two beehives, suggests that "any serviceable container was acceptable for the body of a child." The variation in burial practices among different communities in Greece has been used to conclude similar differentiation in parental affection (Golden, 1988). Not only the underrepresentation of children in the burial record, but also the ways in which they were buried have been used to question the value of children in Greek society.

Perhaps the most common argument for the detachment toward children in ancient Greece centers around the practice of exposure. When a newborn child was not wanted, it was taken away and abandoned outside to either be killed by the elements or rescued by a passerby. Infants at the highest risk of being exposed were female, deformed or sickly, illegitimate, or the children of slaves. The aversion to female children was most likely due to economic reasons, since women were less likely to bring money in and also required dowries. The exposure of deformed or sick infants was required by law in Sparta, where all newborns had to be examined by a council of elders in order to be given permission to be reared. The practice of exposure is considered one of the biggest obstacles for modern scholars trying to understand the ancient ideology of children (Garland, 1990).

The brutality and seeming lack of conscience involved in infant exposure has led to many conclusions that children were unmourned and unvalued in ancient Greece. Garland (1990, 84) slammed the practice of exposure, calling it "a totally hypocritical way of salving a bad conscience at the cost of every shred of human decency" and evidence that "[the Greeks] paid not the least regard to the rights of a newborn child." Garland also ascribed exposure as evidence in support of Lawrence Stone's thesis, which states that high child mortality rates led to a reduced level of emotional attachment and affection from parents (Golden, 1988). To many scholars, a practice like exposure cannot exist in a society where children were loved and valued by their families and communities.

Modern scholars' explanations of the treatment of both living and deceased children in ancient Greece often assume that children were socially unimportant. When exploring explanations for the segregation of adults and children in burial locations, Berit Wells suggests that non-adults were not considered active or equal members of society (Kostanti, 2017). This goes along with Hertz's comment about the minimal effect a child's death had on the community as a whole due to their nonexistent role in society (Garland, 1985). Conclusions about the low impact of children in Greek society are at the center of all other arguments for their insignificance. Evidence such as the high mortality rates, low emotional attachment, low-effort child burials, and the practice of exposure are all used to support the overarching idea that children in ancient Greece had little social significance.

3.2 | Arguments for the Significance of Children in Ancient Greece

The assertion that high mortality rates result in less emotional parental attachment has been refuted by many scholars. Golden (1990), by drawing comparisons between ancient Greeks

and modern populations with high child mortality rates, has concluded that the opposite effect often occurs: “Far from being indifferent, members of cultures in which children are at risk often make sure that their infants are in almost constant contact with a care-giver...precisely because they know the danger that they will die if they are not attended to” (84). Similarly, Antiphon said that “all is full of anxiety” (89) once a child is born, indicating that Greek parents and caregivers worried often about the health of infants. This is far from the images of absent, uncaring parents that other scholars have painted in regards to Greek childcare. There are many examples from antiquity that directly refute the suggestion that parents were hardly affected by children’s deaths—parents who died of grief over the loss of a child, and those mourning who wished they had never had children to begin with (Golden, 1990). Greek parents were acutely aware of the high-risk status of their children, likely put a great deal of effort into keeping them healthy, and mourned them keenly when their efforts failed.

Mourning children may seem paradoxical in the very same societies that practiced exposure of infants, but further consideration suggests these were not mutually exclusive. Exposure is often framed as being motivated by a lack of love or desire for a child, but it was often spurred instead by necessity and cultural expectations. In ancient Athens, an emphasis on preserving the *polis* resulted in the encouragement of an increase in the number of households (*oikoi*), and thus reproduction. However, an increase in children required the thinning of resources for heirs and dowries, putting pressure on a household’s ability to survive. In some cases, exposure was utilized to combat this phenomenon by limiting the number of children requiring resources. Scott (1999, 69) writes, “The primary object of Athenian infanticide was the same as the object of reproduction: to secure the continuity of the *oikos* with all its social, religious, political and military implications”. Practical considerations were also employed in the

Spartan's practice of exposure. Since the primary targets of Spartan exposure seem to be those who were sickly or deformed, such acts were likely motivated by concerns over the cost of raising these children, who had no place in a warrior society focused on physical perfection and homogeneity (Scott, 1999). There are no sources that suggest Spartan exposure involved any belief that such infants were evil or malevolent (Garland, 1990). From what is known about Athenian and Spartan practices of infant exposure, it is unlikely that negative emotions toward children played any role in such decisions.

It is important to recognize that many Greeks did not condone the practice of exposure, nor does this custom cancel out any compassion for the exposed infant. There is evidence to suggest that many parents wanted to rear children regardless of deformities, and that exposure was often regarded with abhorrence. Many examples from both Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedies paint exposure in a negative light, with characters expressing reluctance and regret in such practices. Additionally, exposure was not seen as deliberately causing or willing an infant's death. The common practice of exposing infants in public places indicates the parents' hope that the infant would be rescued by a stranger. Thebes and Ephesus are even recorded as having legislation that banned or restricted the practice (Garland, 1990). In societies that did practice exposure, there was a deliberate commitment to rear children that were not exposed. These children were then more likely to be wanted, cared for, and mourned (Golden, 1990). Far from indicating an outright hatred or indifference to infants, the practice of exposure coexisted with love and compassion for children.

As for the children who were chosen to be reared, parents put a great deal of stock into their magical and religious protection throughout childhood and adolescence. Amulets, stag-beetle horns, dog dung, and skin and teeth of wolves were used to protect children from disease,

vampires, and the evil eye (Golden, 1988). Parents also placed their children under the protective influence of *kourotrophoi*, or fostering deities. Votive dedications and offerings show the high esteem in which these deities were held. The high mortality rates probably fostered such reliance on divine sponsorship, causing beliefs that children would not reach adulthood unless they were adopted by a *kourotrophos* (Garland, 1990). The Greeks were all too aware of the risks posed to growing children and turned to magic and religious methods to combat such dangers. This dedication is yet another example of the efforts taken to care for children in ancient Greece.

Let us recall the various roles children played in ancient Greek society: active members of the religious community, central figures in the survival of the *polis*, and sympathetic agents in art and literature (Beaumont, 2012; Garland, 1985, 1990; Golden, 1990; Houby-Nielsen, 2000). The symbolism and power of children in ancient Greece can be seen in the religious, civic, and social spheres, leaving very little room to argue their insignificance. Their social standings were varied, unique, and complex to be sure, but never inconsequential. High mortality rates heightened concern over children's wellbeing, prompting magical and religious efforts to protect them. The practice of exposure did not negate these concerns, but coexisted with them. Exposure was far from universal in the Greek world, and a desire to provide and care for their existing children may have even motivated the instances when it did take place. While it is possible that the Greeks generally viewed their children with indifference or even negative emotions, there is compelling evidence from a variety of sources that strongly suggests otherwise.

3.3 | Analysis

Regardless of which side of the argument scholars studying ancient Greece fall on, the majority have employed a variety of sources to support or refute the assertion that children were

significant in ancient Greek society. These sources have included inferred demographic statistics, Greek drama and myth, ancient historians, inscriptions, and archaeological finds. Sometimes historians have chosen to only focus on one *polis*, usually Athens, but others speak of a generic Greek ideology, unchanging across the Greek world. Exceptions to this all-encompassing mindset are occasionally mentioned, but not often. When archaeological evidence is presented, data from only a few sites is used to speak for the entirety of Greek history. While the majority of the evidence used to support either side is valid, there are some very conspicuous holes when it comes to cultural variation over time and space in Greek society.

Ultimately, much of the scholarship on the significance of children in ancient Greece—especially those testifying the insignificance of children—is based on anecdotes, oversimplifications, and assumptions. Archaeological studies are underutilized, cited only briefly and with little analysis. Scholars often assume that less child burials correlate with less respect for and significance of children, but this is an incomplete viewpoint. These assumptions ignore other possibilities for underrepresentation and oversimplify the absence of children in the archaeological record, a question that is still being investigated to this day. The lack of a holistic archaeological assessment of child burials in Greece that covers a wide range of sites and time periods is clearly lacking. Variation in Greek culture, customs, and ideology is largely ignored by those arguing for or against the significance of children, leaving a huge gap in the understanding of this issue.

To take a more comprehensive approach to analyzing this argument, I will be looking at a large scope of Greek archaeological data. The sites I have chosen span from the Bronze Age to the early Roman period, from Sicily to the Black Sea. Most of my sources were written by archaeologists directly involved in the excavation process. Their descriptions of their findings

involve detailed analyses of the burials, including information about burial locations, grave goods, exceptions, and change over time. At all of the sites I have studied, child burials have been found, but the numbers and conditions of these burials vary greatly. It is important to note that I have not picked and chosen sites that fit my argument; instead, I let this collection of sites, which I believe to be an accurate representation of the diversity of Greek archaeological sites, direct my case. This method, combined with the historical data and ancient sources cited by previous scholars, gives way to a more holistic perspective of ancient Greek culture. Classical Athens is not the only nor most important subset of Greek history. By including data from many other *poleis* spanning thousands of years, the complexity and variation of ancient Greece can be considered.

One of the greatest strengths of archaeology is its ability to put other sources into context. Demographics such as the high mortality rates of children can be seen in large numbers of buried infants. In some cases, anecdotes from ancient authors and literature can be supported or refuted by archaeological findings. Most importantly, assessments of burial practices can confirm or deny assertions about the care and effort put into child burials. The methods of burial, presence of grave goods, and burial location are some of the main factors to consider when analyzing arguments about the significance of children. By adding my assessments of child burial practices and patterns to these discussions of societal importance, I hope to fill in the gaps and offer new perspectives on the existing scholarship.

Chapter 4 | Children in the Archaeological Record

The examination of archaeological studies from a multitude of sites scattered around the Mediterranean has given way to a number of trends. The main areas of data I have examined concern the presence and absence of children at these sites, where they are located—especially in relation to other individuals—what methods were used for the burials, the presence or absence of grave goods, how children's burial treatment compared to that of adults, and the relationship of deceased children to symbolic and religious systems. From this, trends of children's underrepresentation, exclusion, separation, differentiation, and lack of offerings have emerged, along with additional connections to religious and magical practices. However, exceptions and contradictions to these patterns have emerged as well, adding complexity and nuance to the way we understand children's place in ancient Greek society. Both the trends and the deviations must be considered in order to create a complete picture of the significance of children across time and space in ancient Greece.

4.1 | Patterns

Underrepresentation of infants and children in the archaeological record is a recurring theme dating back to the earliest reaches of Greek history. In numerous Mycenaean sites from the Late Bronze Age, age biases in burial customs resulted in a lack of infants and children. This has especially resulted in the absence of those under two years old in communal burial assemblages (Kostanti, 2017). The Sub-Mycenaean period of Athens has notably revealed fewer infant burials than older children. Due to the decrease in mortality rates as children age, this phenomenon is also representative of age-based differentiation of burial practices and the demarcation of an infant age group (Houby-Nielsen, 2000; Shepherd, 2018). The Early Iron Age site of Knossos in Crete also suggests links between more rigid age grouping and underrepresentation of children (Pomadere, 2010). In some cases, only a handful of child burials have been found from entire time periods; the entire Geometric period in Attica and the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods in Sparta have yielded few, if any, child graves (Garland, 1990; Themos, Zavvou, 2010). While this lack of children in the archaeological record is often a challenge for archaeologists, their absence reflects burial customs and still offers insight into ancient Greek sociocultural practices.

Changes in the representation of children in the archaeological record can also be important indicators of social change. At sites where data on child burials from multiple time periods has been collected, the changes in proportions of children to adults provide opportunities for these insights. One example is the Kerameikos Cemetery in Athens, particularly its burials dating from 700 BC to 400 BC. The number of child burials rises and falls throughout the history of this cemetery, leading to important questions about the causes behind such fluctuations. In the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods, the prevalence of infant burials is high. It subsequently

drops in the Late Classical and Early Hellenistic periods, before ultimately rising again during Late Hellenistic and Early Roman times (Houby-Nielsen, 1995; Lagia, 2007). A similar story of changing representation is seen in Sicily, where several sites reveal a sudden decline in the total number of child burials occurring around the 6th century BC, despite high representation in earlier phases (Shepherd, 2018). While children are commonly absent from the archaeological record, fluctuations in this underrepresentation are important pieces of the overall trends of child burial.

Spatial segregation based on age is extremely common in ancient Greek communal cemeteries. Often, child burials were relegated to a specific area of the burial grounds, distinctly separated from adult burials. In Mende's seaside cemetery, the southern part was reserved for children and infants from the end of 8th century BC to the end of the 6th century BC (Moschonissioti, 2010). During the 5th century BC, a true child necropolis developed in the Athenian Kerameikos Cemetery. This was still considered part of the same cemetery, but there was a clear desire to keep children separated from other grave tumuli and buildings. This is an extension of the segregation seen in the 7th and 6th centuries BC in this cemetery, when children were grouped around the fringes of tumuli and grave buildings—still separated, but not as distinctly as the developments in the 5th century (Houby-Nielsen, 1995; Lagia, 2007).

The most extreme form of age-based segregation of burial location can be seen in exclusive, child-only burial grounds. In the Sub-Mycenaean period of Athens, infants and children were buried on the Acropolis, close to habitation. Later on, during Athens' city-state period of 720 BC to 400 BC, three specific areas became abundant with infant and child burials: an area south of the Acropolis, the Kerameikos Cemetery on either side of the Sacred Way, and a cemetery at and north of the Eirai Gate (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). In the 8th century BC, the site of

Eretria depicts even more specific age segregation: infants under the age of one were buried near habitation, while those over the age of one were buried in separate burial grounds altogether (Blandin, 2010). The Kylindra Cemetery on the island of Astypalaia is one of the most extreme examples of an ancient Greek cemetery specifically reserved for children; of the over 2700 burials found thus far, no individuals over the age of three have been identified (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). Yet another example of a child-only burial area has been found at Sparta, dating to at least the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. This area, located in a streambed, contained hundreds of successive child and infant burials (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). Two additional sites from the Hellenistic period have revealed extremely similar depositions of hundreds of infant remains at the bottoms of wells: one in Messene, and another in the Athenian Agora (Bourbou, Themelis, 2010; Shepherd, 2018). Like the other cases of child cemeteries and burial grounds, these examples provide crucial insight into where it was deemed acceptable to dispose of deceased children when communal burial areas were off-limits to these age groups.

As proven by the well depositions in Messene and Athens, locations for burials outside of communal burial grounds did not always occur as formalized cemeteries. The practice of burying children within settlements and domestic contexts was a frequent occurrence, especially before the Archaic period (Shepherd, 2018). The burial of children near settlements on the Acropolis in Sub-Mycenaean Athens, as well as the burial of infants in habitation areas in 8th century BC Eretria, have already been discussed in the context of age-based segregation of burial locations (Blandin, 2010; Houby-Nielsen, 2000). Additionally, the underrepresentation of children under two years of age in communal Mycenaean cemeteries has been partially explained by the presence of infants buried in domestic contexts in the Late Bronze Age (Kostanti, 2017). At times, intramural burials of children occur simultaneously with their burials in formal cemeteries,

as is the case at Volos and Halos, in addition to Athens and Eretria (Shepherd, 2018). There is also clear evidence of the continuation of this practice well into the Hellenistic and Early Roman period at Sparta. Here, intramural burials continued along with cemetery deposition despite the Roman prohibition against it (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). Throughout Greek history, burying children within settlements appears to be a common alternative to burial within formal cemeteries.

The most common burial method by far for children was the *enchytrismos* burial, or interment inside a ceramic pot or storage vessel. This practice was rarely used for adults, creating a contrast between the burial methods used for adults versus those used for children. In Mycenaean Greece, the method of burying children in vessels was reserved for intramural burials only, but this limitation did not last (Kostanti, 2017). At Iron Age Knossos, *enchytrismoi* burials were the normal mode of burial for children, while adults were typically cremated (Pomadere, 2010). Pot burials were also the most common burial method for children and infants in 8th century BC Eretria, but adults were buried in pit tombs (Blandin, 2010). Inhumation and cremation for adults were both utilized in Geometric-era Naxos, but again children were laid to rest in *enchytrismoi* (Zaphiropoulou, 2010). While the Kylindra Cemetery on Astypalaia contains only young child and infant pot burials, the nearby Katsalos Cemetery contains the inhumed remains of adults, fragmented due to successive burials (Clement, Hillson, Michalaki-Kollia, 2008). For Mende and the West Pontic colonies of Orgame and Istros, pot burials again are the child burial method of choice, while adults were interred in pit burials or cremated, in the case of Orgame (Lungu, 2010; Moschonissioti, 2010). The prevalence of *enchytrismoi* burials for children across many eras and sites created a strong age-differentiated split between the burial methods used for adults and those used for children.

The practice of child *enchytrismoi* burials did not occur in Athens until the Protogeometric period. During this time, cremation became popular for adults—a change from the earlier Sub-Mycenaean period when adults were buried in cist graves and children in small, stone-lined pits (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). The Kerameikos Cemetery, which was in use for hundreds of years, gives important insight into the changes in burial practices in Athens at this time. Between 700 and 560 BC, adults continued to be cremated, but this trend switched to inhumation for the rest of the 6th and 5th centuries BC. Throughout all three centuries, infants and small children were buried in vases (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). Again, a clear distinction between adult burial practices and child burial practices can be seen in the ways in which the Athenians disposed of their dead.

The presence or absence of grave goods buried with children has also pointed to distinctions between children and older individuals. In Mycenaean Greece, the children found in domestic contexts were buried without grave goods. These were children under the age of two that were separated from communal burial grounds (Kostanti, 2017). At the Kylindra Cemetery on Astypalaia, a few grave goods were found, consisting of fragmented pots and vases that were associated with infants older than 6 months of age (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). At the seaside cemetery at Mende, 90% of the pot burials, the most common burial method used for infants, lacked any grave goods, while pit burials, used for older children and adults, were relatively well-furnished (Moschonissioti, 2010). Likewise, all but one of the *enchytrismoi* burials from several West Pontic Greek colonies have lacked any grave offerings (Lungu, 2010). In sites from all over Greece, ranging from the Bronze Age to the Early Roman period, there is a very strong trend in which grave goods were not included in the burials of infants and young children.

In Athens, age-related patterns of grave goods were in effect for around a thousand years.

The older a child was at death, the higher the number of pieces of jewelry, terracotta, toys, and gendered items that were included in their graves. Inversely, the number of eating or drinking vessels decreased as age increased. *Lekythoi,* perfume containers that were associated with warding off pollution, were also found in higher prevalence as age at death increased; these objects were almost never found in the graves of infants (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). This age-based method of grave goods selection indicates a strong differentiation between infants and older individuals. It also suggests that not only the number, but also the type of grave goods may have been determined by the age of the deceased.

In communities where infants and very young children are separated and given different funerary treatment from the rest of society, it is very common that older children are treated similarly to adults. During the Late Helladic IIIA in Mycenaean Greece, infants older than two or three years of age were buried in chamber tombs alongside adults. Recall that this took place while children under two were buried intramurally, apart from the rest of the community's dead (Kostanti, 2017). In Sub-Mycenaean Athens, older children's graves were more prevalent than infants' and they were buried in the same locations and by the same methods as adults (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). Iron Age Eretria allowed children over the age of one to be buried in designated burial grounds along with adults, while infant burials required differentiation and separation (Blandin, 2010). In the Kerameikos Cemetery in Athens, the formation of age groups that occurred in the 5th, 6th, and 7th centuries BC created "age group 3," consisting of 3-4 to 12-14 year old individuals. At this time, age group 3 was treated similarly to adults both in burial method and burial location (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). Concerning the age differentiation of grave goods, the tombs of five- and six-year-olds and adolescents of the West Pontic colonies received offerings similar to those of adults, while younger individuals lacked any offerings (Lungu,

2010). Richer grave goods are also found in the graves of children older than infants in 6th century BC Sicily, which also resemble adult graves in type (Shepherd, 2018). While the exact age of separation of burial practices varies over time and space, it is common for older children to be treated like adults in burial method, location, and grave goods.

The association of children with religion and magic can be seen in the archaeological record as early as the Bronze Age. Several burials of infants and a fetus have been uncovered at a Late Helladic Mycenaean sanctuary dedicated to a deity associated with water, fecundity, and the underworld. This occurrence suggests a connection between juveniles and religious rituals, as well as a suggestion of the sacredness of the dead (Kostanti, 2017). In the later Kylindra Cemetery on Astypalaia, archaeologists have made speculations about two inscriptions that suggest this site was also a sanctuary. The inscriptions, dedicated to Artemis Lochia and Eileithyia, goddesses of childbirth, have similar religious implications for the presence of such a large infant cemetery on this small island (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). In Athens, the rise in infant burials from the Late Geometric to the end of the 5th century BC was especially prevalent in areas associated with religion and ritual. These areas included the Kerameikos Cemetery, which was linked to chthonic and fertility cults of Eleusis, the Eirai Gate along the route to the sanctuary of Demeter, and the Diochares Gate along the route to the sanctuary of Artemis and Iphigenia in Brauron (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). The repetition of burying children in areas associated with religion points to a relationship between the sacred realm and the deceased that seems to be limited to the youngest members of Greek communities.

The two extremely similar well depositions in Messene and the Athenian Agora dating to the Hellenistic Period also have connections to magical and ritual practices. At Messene, the well has revealed 264 commingled juvenile remains, along with dog bones and fragments of pottery

(Bourbou, Themelis, 2010). Likewise, the Athenian well contained 450 fetal, neonate, and infant remains, along with the bones of 150 dogs (Shepherd, 2018). These assemblages, along with others from additional wells in the Agora as well as ones in Eretria, depict a clear relationship between dogs and the infant dead. Since dog sacrifices in ancient Greece were associated with purification rituals, archaeologists have speculated that the presence of dogs among these depositions indicate rituals to combat the pollution of childbirth and death (Liston, Rotroff, 2013). This symbolic, possibly ritual connection between dogs and babies who died in the perinatal period is yet another example of the close relationship of children and the religious and magical realms.

4.2 | Exceptions

When child funerary treatment is discussed in scholarly literature, the underrepresentation of children in the burial record is often referenced. However, there are many examples of the opposite phenomenon: overrepresentation. The most striking is, of course, the Kylindra Infant Cemetery on Astypalaia. The number of infants recovered from this site—over 2700 and counting—denotes the highest concentration of child burials in any ancient Greek burial context by far (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). The Kerameikos Cemetery of Athens had a high degree of variation in the ratio of children to adults over time, but around 500 BC, children outnumbered adults after quadrupling in number from the previous era (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). In the San Montano Cemetery at Pithekoussai on the island of Ischia, *enchytrismoi* made up 27% of 493 Late Geometric graves, while children made up 66% of the overall sample. The East Necropolis in Himera, Sicily has also revealed a substantial child presence, with 50% of 2400 Archaic graves consisting of *enchytrismoi* for the very young. The Athenian Agora well

deposition is another example of a dense concentration of child remains, with around 450 fetuses, neonates, and infants deposited over a period of just 15 years (Shepherd, 2018). While this context is not a traditional cemetery, it is another instance of an area with a large number of child remains. All these sites add contradictions to the idea that children were generally underrepresented in ancient Greek funerary traditions.

During the 4th century BC, there was a sharp decrease in infant burials in Athenian cemeteries. However, at this same time, a rise in commemorative stelai that depicted children and mothers occurs (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). The increase in relief-decorated gravestones is seen both at the graves of women, who are depicted as mothers, and at the graves of older children (Beaumont 2012). In the Classical period of Athens, small children were also frequently commemorated by often emotional funeral stelai (Garland, 1985). *Lekythoi* depicting poignant scenes of infant death were also found in graves from the 5th and 6th century (Beaumont, 2012). Despite the rather scarce evidence of actual child burials from these time periods in Athens, it would be wrong to say they disappeared from the archaeological record entirely. While they may have been underrepresented physically, they retained representation via other mediums.

The segregation of burials based on age is another phenomenon with a lack of uniformity. From the Early Iron Age to Roman times, there are numerous examples of children being integrated into communal funeral spaces. At the Iron Age site of Lefkandi, children were inhumed or cremated alongside adults in necropoleis (Blandin, 2010). In a necropolis on Naxos dating from the Protogeometric to the Geometric II, children were buried with men (Zaphiropoulou, 2010). A warrior's tomb at Cameiros on the island of Rhodes that dates to the Geometric Period was accompanied by child burials (D'Agostino, 2006). From 560 to 500 BC in the Kerameikos Cemetery of Athens, children were buried with adults who did not have grave

buildings or tumuli, perhaps indicating these adults' lower socioeconomic status (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). Athenian children in the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods were buried with adults, often in graves containing multiple individuals (Lagia, 2007). In Greek Sicily, large cemeteries usually included young children, older children, and adults all in one funerary space (Shepherd, 2018). The Kalfata Necropolis of Apollonia Pontica, used from the 5th to the 2nd centuries BC, has revealed children and adults mixed together, with no reserved area for children (Koeller, Panayotova, 2010). In Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Sparta, the North Cemetery included both children and adults, again without any separation or reserved areas (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). The list of contradictions to the idea that children were generally segregated due to age goes on and on. While they were commonly buried in child-only cemeteries or reserved areas of cemeteries, this was absolutely not a strict rule.

While intramural contexts for burials were often the realm of children, adults were also represented in these areas at times. In the Middle Helladic period of the Bronze Age, Mycenaean sites have revealed intramural burials of both adults and children (Kostanti, 2017). In the Protogeometric and Geometric periods, burials in and near habitation areas were often the norm for all ages, as seen in Athens, Argos, and Corinth. It is supposed that intramural burials became less prevalent once established, formal cemeteries became more common in the 8th century BC. However, intramural burials in Corinth did not immediately stop after the establishment of the North Cemetery during the middle of the 8th century BC (Shepherd, 2018). While there are not as many occurrences of adults being buried within homes or settlements as there are of children throughout ancient Greek history, domestic funerary space was not solely reserved for children.

Differentiation of burial methods based on age was not always the case, either. In Early Iron Age Lefkandi, children were buried in the same place via the same methods as adults

(Blandin, 2010). In most of the Spartan burials excavated from the Protogeometric to the Roman period, adults and children were buried with the same methods and amount of care (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). On the island of Naxos, a necropolis from the Protogeometric to the Geometric II contains inhumations and *enchytrismoi* burials. While the *enchytrismos* method of burial was typically utilized solely for infants and young children, there are examples from this site of adult women being buried in vases (Zaphiropoulou, 2010). A variety of burial methods was employed for children in the Kalfata Necropolis in Apollonia Pontica, but the majority of adults and children were buried in pit graves (Koeller, Panayotova, 2010). A step further than just the same burial method can be seen in Late Hellenistic to Early Roman Athens, when children and adults were commonly buried in the very same graves (Lagia, 2007). The line between adult and child methods of burial was often indistinct, and sometimes even nonexistent.

The practice of cremation is often associated as being reserved for adults only in ancient Greek funerary customs, and for the most part, it was. However, a few examples of cremated children scattered throughout Greece show that, again, nothing can truly be ruled out when it comes to child burial practices. In the Protogeometric period of Athens, the general burial method for children was inhumation, while adults began to be cremated commonly. However, multiple cremation burials containing the burned remains of children have been discovered, indicating indistinct boundaries between age groups (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). As mentioned above, Iron Age Lefkandi has also revealed cremated children buried among adults in necropoleis (Blandin, 2010). Excavations in the Athenian Agora have unearthed infant cremations dating to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC (Garland, 1985). While it was certainly uncommon for infants and children to be cremated, the presence of these rare cremations indicates a lack of absolutes in Greek burial methods.

The presence or absence of grave goods has also proved to be far more varied than commonly recognized. While differentiated grave goods created separation between children and adults, this distinction was not always the case. In Sparta, graves from the Protogeometric to Roman times featured grave goods determined by socioeconomic status, not age. As a result, there are infant graves from the Protogeometric and Geometric that are richly furnished, while others are basically bare. In the Late Hellenistic to Early Roman period, both adults and children in the North Cemetery completely lacked burial objects (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). Up until 560 BC, it was customary for adults and children in the Kerameikos Cemetery of Athens to receive eating and drinking vessels as offerings (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). Apollonia Pontica's Classical and Hellenistic Kalfata Necropolis features an array of grave goods—ceramic vases, strigils, metal objects, and jewelry—but little distinction between adult and child graves (Koeller, Panayotova, 2010). Both in number and in type, grave goods could serve to distort age groups as much as they could serve to differentiate them.

Grave goods for children were not just less than or equal to those of adults; in some cases, they surpassed those of older individuals in wealth and extravagance. In Mycenaean Greece, infant burials in the sanctuary at Ayios Konstantinos Methana contain lavish offerings of vases, figurines, two bronze rings, necklaces, a seal stone, an amulet, and seashells. An infant buried with three adults in Grave Circle A at Mycenae far outshines any other in terms of opulence. The infant, thought to be less than three months old, was covered from head to toe with gold foil, and may have worn a gold diadem on its head (Konstanti, 2017). Rich grave goods have also been found in an Early Geometric *enchytrismos* burial at Ialysos on Rhodes, including a bird shaped vessel, a single-handed pilgrim flask, and a uniquely-shaped female figure (D'Agostino, 2006). In Archaic Sicily, some of the wealthiest burials belonged to children

(Shepherd, 2018). Along with the other examples of wealthy child burials, this shows that children's graves, rather than always left empty or with few offerings, were capable of being just as wealthy as those of adults, if not more so.

The trend of older children being given funerary treatment similar to that of adults was common, but not universal. There are cases from Mycenaean Greece, Protogeometric Athens, and Late Hellensitic and Early Roman Athens in which infants and older children were undifferentiated or even buried in the same graves (Kostanti, 2017; Lagia, 2007; Houby-Nielsen, 2000). In evaluating the similarities and differences of burial treatment for young and older children, an issue arises concerning the definition of an "older child." Houby-Nielsen (2000) classifies this age group as from 3-4 years old to 8-10. Kostanti (2017) points to the distinction between infants under the age of two or three and those older. Lungu (2010) indicates the similarities in burial treatment between children around the age of five and adolescents. In many cases, specific age distinctions between age groups are not even mentioned, instead referring to broad categories such as "older children," "infants," and "young children." The uncertainty of these definitions means that one site's so-called "older children" would be another site's "young children," making it difficult to assess the differentiation of funerary treatment between these age groups. Other site descriptions do not distinguish between different age groups at all, simply referring to children versus adults. In this chaos of definitions or lack thereof, it is not entirely accurate to make blanket statements claiming that older children were treated the same as adults in death.

Chapter 5 | Discussion

After analyzing the archaeological data, the variation in Greek burial practices for children is clearly apparent. The rates of child burials, where and how children were buried, and the presence and types of grave goods given to children constantly change between sites and time periods. The unknowns and remaining questions that archaeology cannot yet answer contribute to this complexity. Certain elements do not appear in the archaeological record, such as the children that have not been found by archaeologists, unclear determining factors of burial practices, and conflicting interpretations of what defines a "child." The cultural variation, missing links, and shortcomings of archaeology all resist generalized conclusions about societal mechanisms. However, the application of archaeological data to arguments on the importance of children in Greek society clearly trends in favor of their significance. Child burial practices often distinguished children from the rest of society, but these same practices often served as evidence of their importance.

5.1 | Variation

Fluctuations in the burial rates of children can be seen throughout Greece, but it is especially clear in Athens, from which there is continuous archaeological evidence of child burials from the Sub-Mycenaean period to Early Roman times. In the Protogeometric and Middle Geometric, there was a decrease in the overall number of child burials (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). This was followed by a rise in child burials from the Late Geometric to the 4th century, with a strong child presence in Athenian cemeteries in the Archaic and most of the Classical period (Beaumont 2012; Houby-Nielsen, 2000). There was then a significant drop from the 4th century, and ultimately another increase during the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (Beaumont, 2012; Lagia, 2007). As discussed previously, the proportions of children in Athenian burial grounds fluctuated so much that at times they were underrepresented, but other times they outnumbered adults (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). How, then, is it possible to make clear conclusions about the burial treatment of children in Athens, let alone what this treatment suggests about the importance of children in Athenian society? How can we make inferences about the underrepresentation of infants and children in Athenian cemeteries when there is vast fluctuations in their presence in the archaeological record?

These challenges are not limited to Athens, but can be applied to all of Greece. While the scarcity of children in burial grounds is frequent, other cases can throw this entire idea into doubt. A notable example is the Kylindra Cemetery on Astypalaia, where nearly 3000 pot burials of infants have been excavated—unprecedented anywhere in Greece, let alone on a tiny island (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). Kylindra is, of course, far from the norm. However, as we have seen, it is not the only exception to assertions of the paucity of child burials. This site, along with others, should be enough to make scholars hesitate before making over-simplified conjectures.

Generalizations about the presence and absence of children in the archaeological record are dangerous when such extensive variation of child representation exists. Failing to account for this variation is detrimental to the broader understanding of children in ancient Greek society, yet assumptions about underrepresentation are abundant throughout arguments that children had little social significance in Greece.

Variation in representation goes hand in hand with the diversity of burial locations for children. As seen in the archaeological evidence, children were sometimes buried in their own cemeteries and necropoleis, other times mixed in among adults, and sometimes in restricted areas of the same burial grounds as adults. When there is separation, age is often a deciding factor, but the age cutoff for this differentiation varies from site to site. The practice of intramural burials was most commonly reserved for children, but examples, especially from early sites, show that this was not always the case (Kostanti, 2017; Shepherd, 2018). Other examples show the variability of locations deemed acceptable for the deposition of deceased children, notably the well excavations in Messene and the Athenian Agora (Bourbou, Themelis, 2010; Shepherd, 2018). With adults or apart, in formal cemeteries or in more removed contexts—all these possible burial locations for children have substantiation in the archaeological record.

It is important to remember that the vast majority of children who lived and died in ancient Greece have not been found. In cases where they are underrepresented in communal burial grounds, archaeologists are left only with what little evidence does exist. Sites with a strong presence of child burials in out-of-the-way places, such as under the floors of houses and at the bottom of wells, can help to suggest alternative burial locations for infants. However, seeing the variation in burial locations can also raise more questions. The biggest unknown is what exactly determined where infants and children were buried from community to community

and across generations. When making inferences about the ancient past, it is important to recognize the number of unknowns in order to avoid making too broad of assumptions. In the context of the significance of children in ancient Greece, we know many of the accepted locations for disposing of deceased children, but there could be many, many others. The missing children are just as important to the question of significance as the known ones.

The ways in which the children uncovered by archaeologists were buried is another area that lacks clear cut answers. From the sites discussed in this paper, we have seen that children were often buried in pots or other ceramic vessels, but were also frequently buried in pit graves. Many methods of burial were shared between children and adults; there have even been cases of adult women buried in vases, a phenomenon that was reserved for children in most cases (Zaphiropoulou, 2010). Likewise, there are examples (albeit few) of child cremations, despite the regular limitation of cremation to adults. Clearly, despite some strong patterns of child burial methods, the distinction between adults and children was often blurry. Just like the variation in choices of child burial locations, the range of methods used to bury children indicates a variety of appropriate ways to treat children in funerary contexts. Since funerary treatment has important implications for the social status of an individual, the consistent variation in the ways children were buried is significant.

The amounts and types of grave goods associated with child burials also gives important information about the ways children were treated and perceived in ancient Greece. Just like burial locations and methods, grave goods are another highly variable factor in the funerary treatment of children. For many sites, there was an age-based bias for whether or not grave goods were present at all, with older children and adults being the sole recipients of offerings. But young children, even infants, were not always left out. The notable cases of extremely rich infant

burials at Mycenaean sites are just a few examples of such exceptions (Kostanti, 2017). When grave goods are present in child and adult graves, the differences and similarities between these offerings also give insight into the sociocultural status of children. Unsurprisingly, there is also variation in this. The Kerameikos Cemetery of Athens shows that during the 7th and 6th centuries BC, adults and children both frequently received eating and drinking vessels (Houby-Nielsen, 1995). In contrast, children in Sicily often received the wealthiest burials in Archaic times (Shepherd, 2018). When the whole extent of funerary treatment for children is considered, the lack of strong trends is overwhelming.

Age often played a role in the presence or absence of grave goods, but there are many other factors that could have impacted this decision as well. One of these is socioeconomic status. In Sparta, offerings do not appear to be distinguished by age, but rather by socioeconomic status. One infant was discovered with only a rock-crystal bead, while another was furnished with elaborate vases, feeders, cups, and mugs. Archaeologists believe that the wealth of these infants' families are responsible for such stark differences (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). This raises questions about other sites where there are examples of children with meager grave goods—if any—and those with rich offerings. Is this an indication of wealth disparities, or does it indicate something else, such as religious practices? Perhaps it was just a personal choice made by the infant's family. The possibilities are endless. We may never know for sure what reasons there were behind such variations, but attributing it solely to the social significance of children is far from the only option.

Differing burial treatment between adults and children was common in the ancient Greek world, but the exact ages of differentiation often seem ambiguous. In Mycenaean burial grounds, the line seems to be drawn at two years (Kostanti, 2017). At the Kylindra Cemetery, no children

over the age of three have been discovered (Michalaki-Kollia, 2010). In Athens' Kerameikos Cemetery, some differentiation persists toward all children under the ages of eight to ten (Houby-Nielsen, 2000). This inconsistency across different sites and time periods adds to the simple truth that there was no universal response to children in ancient Greek burial customs. Considering the lack of clarity on how Greeks classified children in society through language, this general lack of clear age groups is not surprising (Garland, 1990). This added complexity to the ways children were treated in ancient Greece is yet another reason to be wary of oversimplification.

In response to such widespread diversity in the ways children were treated in death across time and space in ancient Greece, the only consistent pattern is the overall lack of constants. Whether it be in burial locations, methods, grave goods, or differentiation based on age, it is impossible to make any generalizations that cover the entire scope of Greek burial practices in all communities in every time period. The unknowns of archaeology also add complexity to this issue. The missing children and the additional cultural factors that may have influenced funerary treatment are often invisible to archaeologists, making it difficult to propose accurate conclusions about the cultural practices at hand. However, this does not mean there is nothing to be learned from this variation and inconsistency. The wide range of archaeological data we have seen suggests that children were classified and perceived in a variety of ways throughout time in different Greek communities. Just as it is inappropriate to make generalizations about the burial practices used for children, it is counterintuitive to try and group these differing social perceptions of children under one comprehensive umbrella. The question of the significance of children in ancient Greek society is not black and white.

5.2 | The Significance of Children in the Archaeological Record

There is no evidence in the archaeological record that the differentiation of burial locations based on age was rooted in ideas of children's lack of societal importance. It is likely that age-segregation was due to differing perceptions of adults and children, but this does not go hand-in-hand with a disparity in social significance. While the deposition of hundreds of infant remains in the wells of the Athenian Agora and Messene may strike modern observers as disrespectful and abhorrent, these may have simply been socially acceptable locations for the disposal of deceased infants (Shepherd, 2018). The association of dog bones with both sites further supports this interpretation, since dogs were considered aides to the sick and the deceased (Beaumont, 2012; Bourbou, Themelis, 2010). The absence of children in communal burial grounds has long been used as proof of negative perceptions of children in ancient Greece. However, this ignores the possibility that the opposite could have been true. Perhaps, children were buried apart from adults, even in domestic contexts, due to the special significance of children. Scott (1999, 126) points out this disparity in archaeological studies: "Although archaeologists are prepared to ascribe the infant a particular low-status social identity as a result of its underrepresentation in or absence from communal mortuary contexts, they have been fairly reluctant to ascribe it a social identity connected to its *presence* in settlement and house contexts." Underrepresentation of children and differential burial locations are prevalent in ancient Greece, but assumptions that this must mean children were less important than adults are inaccurate and incomplete.

There is so much variation in the methods used to bury children in ancient Greece that any conclusion on children's significance made using this data is unsubstantiated. It is impossible to argue that the Greeks buried infants in simple, utilitarian pots because they were

not socially important when there are numerous sites where pot burials were not the typical burial method for children. The same goes for arguing that adults had richer, more elaborate burials, when it is clear that children were often buried via the same methods as adults. The diversity in funerary treatment speaks for itself: numerous burial methods were considered socially acceptable for children over time and space. This variation disrupts any likelihood that there was a universal Greek standard for the proper way to dispose of children based on their social significance.

Scholars who have suggested that children were insignificant have asserted that deceased children were buried with little effort or ceremony (Garland, 1985). The archaeological evidence says otherwise. In a mass grave containing presumed plague victims in the Kerameikos Cemetery, the eight infants present received much more careful burials than the 89 adults accompanying them. The infants were positioned carefully, with pieces of pottery placed over them in *pseudo-enchytrismoi* burials, while the adults were thrown in haphazardly (Beaumont, 2012). At the infant Kylindra Cemetery on the island of Astypalaia, *enchytrismoi* burials were laid in pits that were carved into the hard bedrock (Hillson, 2001). *Enchytrismoi* burials in general required a certain amount of effort; the opening for the infant's body was cut into the belly of the vessel using a knife or saw, and a rock or piece of pottery was used to cover the vessel's mouth (Houby-Nielsen, 2000; Michalaki-Kollia, 2010; Moschonissioti, 2010). This is hardly an example of a hasty, effortless burial method. The assumption that simple burials with little care or effort were the preferred method for children in ancient Greece has very little weight to it.

Archaeological evidence also sheds doubt onto the idea that the Greeks "buried children cheaply." The observation that "any serviceable container was acceptable for the body of a

child" is based on the common use of undecorated, utilitarian ceramic vessels for *enchytrismoi* burials (Garland, 1985, 78). Contrary to this, there are cases of richly decorated vases being used for this purpose. One example is Mende, where the majority of the 173 excavated pot burials are richly painted *amphorae* and *pithoi* (Moschonissioti, 2010). Another is Paros, where large *amphorae* with vibrant scenes depicting myths and daily life were used for child *enchytrismoi* graves (Zaphiropoulou, 2010). As discussed previously, child graves were not always devoid of grave goods. The infant buried in Mycenae with a suit of gold foil is an extreme example of a child's potential wealth in death, but there are many other examples of children receiving similar efforts and expenses to adults (Kostanti, 2017). Claims of children being buried "cheaply" are not only misleading, but also completely ignore children's burials that show clear signs of great expense and effort.

Historical evidence shows us that in many ways, children were typically seen as having a distinctly different place in society than adults. However, this distinction is not always very clear in the archaeological record. Sometimes, adults and children received different funerary treatment in every aspect; they were buried in different areas via different methods with different grave goods. Other times, adults' and children's graves were intermingled, or even shared. Children could be buried just like adults, with there even being examples of child cremation—a practice thought to be limited to adults (Garland, 1985). Likewise, the distinction between the offerings received by adults versus those of children was not always clear or present. Many assertions about the insignificance of children rely on differences in how adults and children were treated in death. When these distinctions are not present, such arguments about children's low-status in Greek society fall apart.

One of the biggest weaknesses in the arguments against the social significance of

children in ancient Greece is that they fail to account for these exceptions. Assertions that children were buried cheaply, unceremoniously, with little to no commemoration, is simply not true, according to the physical evidence of the past. Documented cases of careful, lavish, and commemorated child burials are direct contradictions to these rationales. As discussed above, the frequent similarities between adult and child funerary treatment further casts doubt onto such arguments. In addition, the vast amount of variation present in child burial practices rejects any blanket statements concerning child funerary treatment and social importance. At best, these arguments have quite a few holes. The failure to account for this cultural variation has left the idea that children were socially unimportant in ancient Greek society extremely unconvincing.

Even when assumptions about ancient Greek child burials hold true, there is nothing to suggest that these practices represent the insignificance of children. The underrepresentation or absence of children in communal cemeteries does not necessarily mean children were unworthy of such treatment, for the simple reason that separation does not always equate to disparities in social worth. The possibility that children received proper, respectable burials apart from adults, or otherwise received honorable funerary treatment yet unknown to archaeologists is extremely likely. The burial methods used for children—especially the most common practice of *enchytrismoi* burials—similarly lack any indication that they were a step below those of adults. Grave offerings are another cultural practice that does not have clear implications for social significance, since it is unknown what factors determined the presence and type of grave goods. Socioeconomic status is likely to have played a role, as in the case of Sparta, and perhaps religious customs, as in the case of the infant burials at the sanctuary of Ayios Konstantinos Methana (Themos, Zavvou, 2010). Even in the most stereotypical of child burials, nothing is a clear indicator of a lack of social significance.

So, how should we interpret the frequent differentiation between adults and children? The conclusion best supported by the archaeological evidence is that children were typically considered a separate social group from adults that required different burial treatments and locations. It is important to recognize, however, that children were still deemed worthy of such funerary customs, even though the location, method, and objects associated with such practices varied. Whether children received identical or drastically different treatment from adults, the graves themselves often demonstrate a deliberate effort to give children proper burial rites. These burials are clear evidence of children that were both wanted and significant (Beaumont, 2012). Although they might have often looked different from those of adults, child burials' very existence is strong evidence for the importance of children in ancient Greek society.

When the archaeological data is combined with the historical knowledge of ancient Greek society, the separation between children and adults is a recurring theme. Additionally, the care and effort given to children in the archaeological record reflects the historical data that shows the influence children held in society. This, along with the huge amount of temporal and spatial variation, further rejects the idea that children were unimportant in ancient Greece. To get the full picture of how children were perceived and treated, all possible types of data should be considered. This includes ancient literature and inscriptions, art depicting children, artifacts associated with childcare, and, the main focus of this paper, funerary treatment (i.e., burial location, burial methods, and grave goods). When the subject of children in society is approached holistically, the data clearly trends in support of the argument that children were indeed significant. There is no compelling reason in either the historical or archaeological data to support the theory that children were insignificant.

Chapter 6 | Conclusion

The question of the childrens' significance in ancient Greek society has been debated in academia for the past few decades. The majority of this discussion has relied on historical data, especially concerning the health and mortality of ancient children and their burial practices. Many scholars have pointed out the high mortality rates of children in the ancient world, which would have resulted in just as many deceased children as adults. This proportion is rarely seen in ancient cemeteries, though, with children instead appearing in drastically lower numbers than adults within the archaeological record. Additional differences in burial locations, burial methods, and grave goods between children and adults further signifies a separation between these age groups. Both sides of the argument of the importance of children in ancient Greece have used select examples from the historical and archaeological data to support their views. However, the variation in burial practices over time and space has important implications for this debate and has yet to be accounted for.

Historical evidence concerning ancient ideas of children has also been utilized often by scholars arguing for or against the significance of children. While it is unclear how the Greeks classified children in language, a series of important festivals and rites of passage in their first few years facilitated their journey into the public sphere. Children's status as fundamentally different than adults actually created special opportunities for children, especially in the religious and symbolic realms. In literature and art, children were often used as a tool to evoke emotion. In all of these ways, children's unique status in Greek society allowed them to fulfill certain roles or functions in their communities. The separation of children and adults has led some scholars to conclude that children were not significant actors in their communities, but others have pointed out cases that contradict this interpretation. Since the ways in which children were treated in death were socially determined, this is another area that would benefit from additional examination of the archaeological evidence and its relation to children's social importance.

Those who have argued the insignificance of children in ancient Greece have typically relied on assumptions made from select pieces of the historical data. The high mortality rates of children have been used to argue a lack of emotional attachment between parents and their children. Additionally, the differentiation of adults and children present in cemeteries as well as in burial practices have often been relied upon as evidence of children's unimportance. Archaeological examples of children being buried "cheaply"—in utilitarian vessels and without grave goods or commemoration—have also added to the debate. To top it off, the Greek practices of exposure have contributed to the strength of this side of the argument. These claims, though, often oversimplify the issues and ignore the great deal of variation present in Greek cultural practices, especially those concerning children.

The opposing side of the debate, which argues that children were significant in ancient

Greek society, touches on many of the same topics, but with alternative interpretations. Drawing on examples from literature, commemorative stelai, and modern communities with high child mortality rates, they have found much evidence to suggest that ancient peoples worried about their children and mourned them keenly when they died. Cases seen in tragedies and even in legislature show that exposure was often vehemently opposed. When it was practiced, it may have been motivated by a desire to appropriately care for living children and to conserve resources rather than by some malice for the infant. Far from being looked down upon, children were often seen as the future of a *polis* and great lengths were taken to ensure their survival and wellbeing, often through religious and magical means. The variation of the historical data has yielded multiple interpretations of how children were perceived and treated in ancient Greece that often directly contradict one another. A more holistic approach was needed to assess the validity of both sides more accurately.

The incorporation of archaeological data was needed in order to fill in the gaps of the arguments for the significance or insignificance of children. To do this, various sites were selected from across the Mediterranean and from a variety of time periods. Evidence of burial locations, burial methods, and grave goods was examined for children and adults to note the similarities and differences in burial practices for different age groups. Several patterns emerged: the underrepresentation of children in communal burial grounds, the segregation of children's graves into specially reserved areas, intramural burials for children, *enchytrismoi* burials as the most common burial method for children, few grave goods for children, the similarities of burial practices between older children and adults, and connections between children and religious and magical practices. These trends suggest a strong pattern of differentiating burial treatment based on age, reflecting a social structure that considered children and adults as fundamentally different

social groups. However, there is little evidence to suggest that one group was buried with more respect or effort than the other.

The variation of Greek burial practices of children is best illustrated by sites that contradict each pattern listed above. Examples of underrepresentation are met with those of vast assemblages of children, as in the Kylindra Cemetery of Astypalaia. Age segregation was not a universal custom, and there are many cases where adults and children were buried together, as well as adults being buried in domestic contexts like children. Often, there was overlap of burial methods, with adults sometimes being buried via pot burials like children and children being buried via "adult" methods, sometimes even being cremated. As for grave goods, some of the richest burials found have been those belonging to children. Issues such as the lack of consistency with definitions of age groups like "older children" have led to incongruencies in interpretations of age-based burial practices. The constant change in child burial customs over time and space throughout the Greek world indicates that there were no universal ways in which children were perceived and treated. These exceptions resist the generalizations that other scholars have made and thus have important implications for the debate of children's significance in ancient Greece.

The variation and unknowns of archaeology add complexity to the analysis of this debate. Fluctuating burial rates and representation of children show the ever-changing nature of child burial practices, making it impossible to formulate clear conclusions out of the data even on a site-by-site basis. The different burial locations, burial methods, and grave goods further discourage generalizations. The children missing from the archaeological record raise more questions than anything. Why were some excluded and others not? Where and how were these children disposed of? We may never know. Factors other than age may have also played a role in

determining burial practices, such as socioeconomic status. When age did play a role, the exact ages of differentiation are often ambiguous, varying from site to site and between time periods. With all these variations, contradictions, and unknowns, oversimplification of the archaeological data must be avoided in order to accurately assess the ways children were conceptualized in ancient Greek society.

Examples from the archaeological data that clearly contradict arguments for the insignificance of children are enough to cast doubt on this side of the debate. Their claims that children were buried cheaply and without much effort are proved wrong over and over by cases in which children were buried with great care and elaborate grave goods. This argument also relies on the assumption that there were always distinctions between the burial practices of adults and children. While age-based burial differentiation was common, numerous examples of children and adults being buried in the same place via the same methods with similar grave offerings show that such assumptions do not always hold true. Even when these differences are present, there is no compelling evidence that they indicate a disparity in social importance. The archaeological evidence both disproves this side's arguments and fails to support its assumptions and generalizations.

With the evidence that is present, it seems that children were typically separated from adults, but likely just as important. The frequent differentiation of burial location, methods, and grave goods indicates this interpretation, while the exceptions to these trends remind us of the cultural variation that affected these practices. The historical evidence supports these conclusions by showing that children were often held apart from adults, yet still had important roles in the religious, social, and even political realms. The variation seen in how children were classified, treated, and discussed in ancient Greece also matches the diversity of the archaeological

evidence. While more needs to be learned before we can know for sure how important children were to ancient Greek society, both the historical and archaeological records offer more support to suggest they were significant, cared for, respected, and mourned.

To explain the variation and further clarify the significance of children in ancient Greece, more research needs to be done. One area to focus on could be the influence of socioeconomic status on burial practices. Some sites to look at in relation to this would be Sparta, where status is thought to have played a role in determining grave goods, and Athens' Kerameikos Cemetery, where there are occurrences of children being buried with low status adults (Houby-Nielsen, 1995; Themos, Zavvou, 2010). Similarly, the role of familial ties may have been a determining factor in cemetery organization as well as burial methods. Spatial organization and burials based on familial ties have been discussed by Koeller and Panayotova (2010), Moschonissioti (2010), and Zaphiropoulou (2010), but a more in-depth study would be valuable. Further study into Greek beliefs of children's place in the afterlife may also hold key insight into the ways children were perceived. Bioarchaeological studies of children's remains would reveal important information about children's health and causes of death, which could be applied to the debate as well. The question of the children's significance is complex, concerning many factors that played a role in both the life and death of children. Future research on more of these factors will allow scholars to make more accurate conclusions in the effort to assess child significance in ancient Greek society.

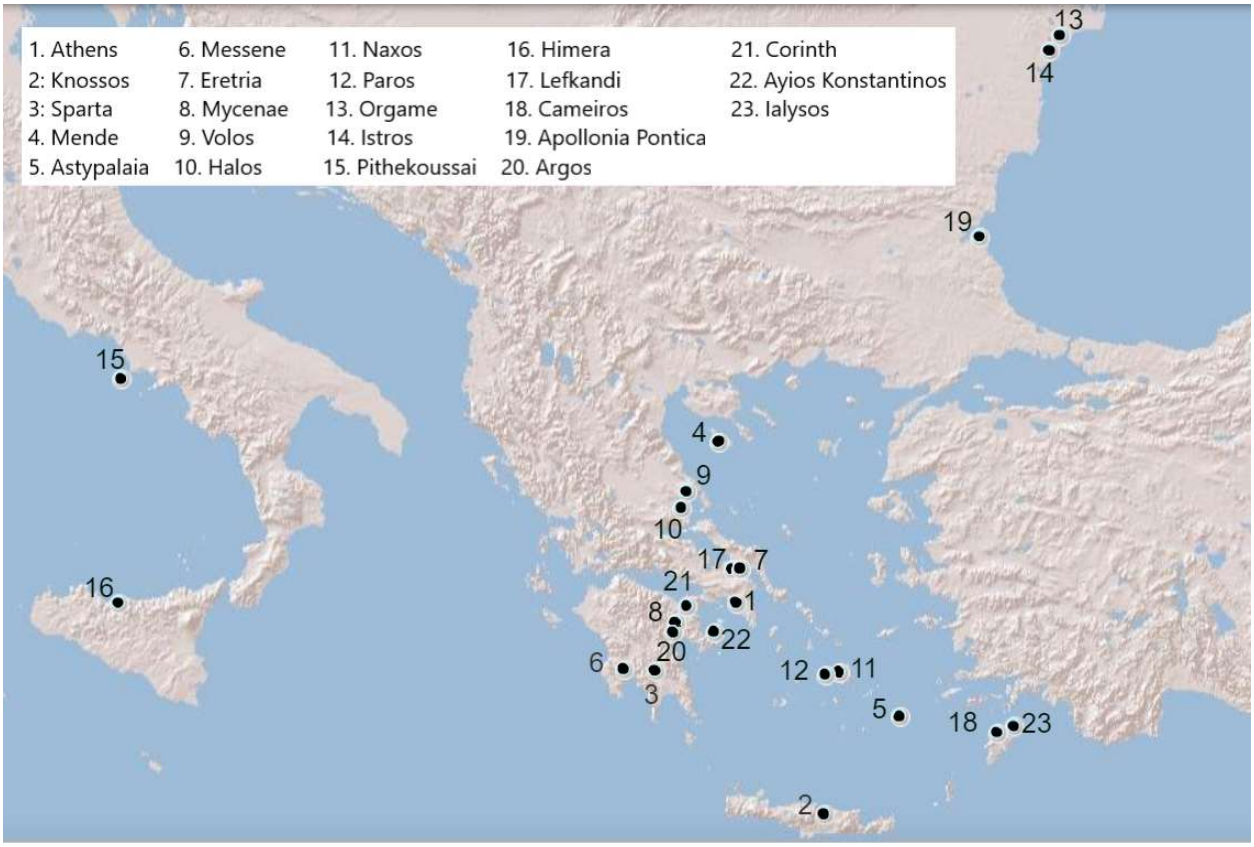

Figure 1. Map of the archaeological sites discussed in the text (prepared by Melina Edic).

Figure 2. Example of a pot or *enchytrismos* burial from the Kylindra Cemetery of Astypalaia (from Hillson, 2009).

Figure 3. Example of an infant pit burial (from Moschonissioti, 2010).

Figure 4. Example of a cist grave (from Moschonissioti, 2010).

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